

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
January 9, 2004

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
Andy Williams  
Ed Rogan

## **State awards contract for DYFS computer system**

TRENTON— The New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) announced today it has selected a vendor to implement a new child welfare information system to help caseworkers track and monitor children and families.

The contract for the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) to be used by the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) has been awarded to American Management Systems, Inc. (AMS) headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia. The \$26.8 million contract is subject to review and approval by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.

"Thanks to Governor McGreevey, we are finally on the road to providing our staff with the technology they need to do their jobs effectively," said DHS Commissioner Gwendolyn L. Harris. "SACWIS is long overdue. Past administrations did not, for whatever reason, see fit to update our child welfare information system. We're still using the same computer system I used 20 years ago as a DYFS district office manager."

SACWIS will reduce manual paperwork and repetitive data entry allowing workers to spend more time in the field protecting children. SACWIS' enhanced functionality will benefit DYFS workers and community providers as they will now be able to provide more timely services to children and families.

New Jersey is one of only six states yet to implement SACWIS. DYFS currently relies upon a combination of six mainframe, 17 PC based and five Oracle-based systems to support child welfare operations. Current systems are incapable of producing necessary prompts/alerts of casework activities and fail to provide supervisors with the necessary management tools to track case practice issues.

In addition, the current systems cannot talk to each other or share information. SACWIS will integrate the data and functionality of these systems into one integrated application providing a seamless source of information to the Division and its workers.

The new system will also incorporate specific prompts/alerts for caseworkers to visit families or conference a case with supervisors within designated timeframes. This will allow caseworkers, supervisors and senior management to proactively manage individual cases and the overall caseload.

“SACWIS will improve our system of checks and balances,” said Commissioner Harris. “How many children have been placed at risk because staff didn’t have accurate information or couldn’t access it at all?”

As part of the reform plan to improve the State’s child welfare system, more than 2600 new computers have already been supplied as part of the SACWIS development. Using the latest web-based technology, SACWIS will produce an integrated system that will:

- Support quality assurance, outcome monitoring and evaluation through improved tracking of cases, including required reviews and assessments to ensure that all cases are properly accounted for and served as promptly and effectively as possible
- Expand automated management reports to facilitate timely policy decision-making, program evaluation, quality assurance, accounting, research and other administrative functions
- Support the automation of DYFS’ Structured Decision Making (SDM) process that will improve consistency and accuracy in the decisions staff makes. SDM is a decision-making model that sets specific criteria for determining immediate and long-term risk to a child and facilitates case planning
- Brings the state in compliance with Federal regulations such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) that require an automated child welfare system
- Provide appropriate interfaces with other information systems to coordinate information and communication with the courts, Work First New Jersey (TANF), Medicaid, and child support enforcement
- Enhance DYFS’ ability to meet Federal AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) and NCANDS (National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System) reporting requirements - translating into increased Federal reimbursements including Title IV-E (foster care)
- Enhance the capacity of DYFS to allocate and monitor the expenditure of funds for third party contracted social services from private providers to support its child protection/child welfare efforts.

To alleviate problems and to expedite implementation, New Jersey’s SACWIS system will be based upon the successful system AMS developed for Wisconsin. Called eWiSACWIS, Wisconsin’s system supports nearly 3,000 caseworkers with about 800 concurrent users daily. The system being transferred also has the potential to provide mobile and remote functionality to workers and providers, allowing the system to be used in the field and eventually by community groups and service providers.

In addition to Wisconsin, AMS has developed SACWIS systems for Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, New Mexico and Rhode Island. The company has also led SACWIS design projects in Alabama and Louisiana.

Seven vendors originally supplied bids which were subsequently reviewed for compliance by the Department of Treasury's Division of Purchase and Property. Bidders were required to meet New Jersey procurement regulations and were subjected to extensive review including reference checks, on-site visits and program demonstrations.

Installed through a series of modules, the system will be operational within 24 months with the first module rolling out statewide within the first year. Recognizing the importance of providing staff with the tools they need to serve New Jersey's children and families, the Division recently deployed several interim applications to help track visits with children as well as foster care placements which can lead to better documentation and additional Federal reimbursement for Title-IV E (foster care).

# # #

Additional Information:

American Management Systems, Charlie Greenwald, (703) 227-7662